

From Central India to Polynesia :

A NEW LINGUISTIC SYNTHESIS.

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In the undermentioned essay ⁽¹⁾ that indefatigable worker, Professor W. Schmidt, of Mödling, Austria, has taken another great stride along the line of research that he has marked out for himself and made peculiarly his own. In order to appreciate the nature and importance of his latest contribution, it is necessary to refer to the history of the problems he has been investigating. A quarter of a century ago the existence and extent of the principal language-families of Southern and South-Eastern Asia and the Indian Archipelago had been established in broad outlines. ⁽²⁾ But there remained a considerable number of forms of speech, some of them known only by name in those days, others already more or less adequately put on record and studied, which did not seem to fit into the accepted classification and had to be left, in little groups of doubtful coherence or even as isolated stragglers, outside the general scheme. This was the case in particular of the Kolarian (now renamed Munda) languages of Central India, of Khasi, of the Mon or Talaing language which is gradually dying out in Lower Burma, of Khmer or Cambojan, Annamese, and an endless string of dialects, some of them hardly known even now, in the inland parts of Indo-China, of the dialects of the Nicobar islanders, and those of the Sakai and Sëmang of the Malay Peninsula.

(1) Die Mon-Khmer-Völker, ein Bindeglied zwischen Völkern Zentralasiens und Austronesiens.—Archiv für Anthropologie, Neue Folge, Band V, Heft 1 und 2.—Braunschweig, 1906.

(2) R. N. Cust's "Sketch of the Modern Languages of the East Indies" may be referred to for particulars of what had been ascertained about that time.

It is true that long before the period referred to attempts had been made to include some of these unsorted items in the regular system of classification which comparative philology endeavours to achieve. Beginning more than half a century ago with Logan's suggestive but too speculative dissertations, it has pretty frequently been pointed out that there are some apparent points of resemblance, if not of connexion, between several of these linguistic derelicts. But as often as a connexion was asserted by one scholar it was denied by another; and as strict proof was not (and in most cases, owing to the inadequacy of the available evidence, could not be) offered, the matter remained unsettled. Of late years additional material for the study of most of these languages has been collected, making it possible to undertake a more systematic investigation into their peculiarities and mutual relations. On this latter task Professor Schmidt has been engaged for some time past. Starting with the conclusions arrived at by Kuhn in his valuable "*Beiträge zur Sprachenkunde Hinterindiens*,"⁽³⁾ that there is a common element running through these different languages but that it would be rash to group them all in one family, Professor Schmidt began in his monograph "*Die Sprachen der Sakei und Semang auf Malakka und ihr Verhältniss zu den Mon-Khmer-Sprachen*"⁽⁴⁾ with an enquiry into the Sakai and Sémang dialects of the Malay Peninsula and their relations to the most ancient group of Southern Indo-Chinese languages.

This important paper was reviewed at some length in No. 39 of this Journal: it suffices to say here that it claimed to establish by strict proof a real genealogical relationship between these two groups of languages, the Southern Indo-Chinese and the Peninsular. In the year 1905 the learned author followed it up with two more studies in the same line of research. His

(3) *Sitzungsberichte d. K. Bayer. Akad. d. Wissensch., Phil.-hist. Kl.*, 1889, I, p. 219 seq.

(4) *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië. 6e Volgreeks, 8e Deel (Deel LII)*, 1901.

"Grundzüge einer Lautlehre der Mon-Khmer-Sprachen" ⁽⁵⁾ laid down for the first time the main lines of the comparative phonology of the Mon, Khmer, Stieng and Bahnar languages. Although perhaps subject to future modification in matters of detail, there can be no doubt that this work gives a new insight into the phonetic structure and past history of these tongues and is an acquisition of permanent value. In his "Grundzüge einer Lautlehre der Khasi-Sprache in ihren Beziehungen zu derjenigen der Mon-Khmer-Sprachen" ⁽⁶⁾ he goes on to show that Khasi, a language spoken in Assam, which had generally been regarded as standing quite alone, is really a distant relative (though not an actual member) of the Mon-Khmer group, and exhibits a similar structure, both phonetic and morphological. All these languages are in fact built up on the same system, viz. from very simple monosyllabic roots to which are added in many cases one or more prefixes or infixes. The same work also for the first time established the fact that the Palaung, Wa and Riang dialects of Upper Burma and the Shan States constitute a linguistic group standing midway between Khasi and the Mon-Khmer family, a fact which agrees remarkably well with the relative geographical position of these several groups.

In his most recent work on this subject Professor Schmidt points out that to this list of cognate languages must now be added the Nicobar dialects, which are not (as had previously been maintained) essentially polysyllabic but are built up just like all the others from monosyllabic roots. In the Nicobarese dialects, however, there is the important difference that not only prefixes and infixes but also suffixes are used in the structure of their words. This last fact is regarded by Professor Schmidt as a material piece of evidence in favour of grouping the Munda languages, which make a great use of suffixes, with the others already mentioned. Undeniably there

(5) Denkschrift. d. K. Akad. d. Wiss., in Wien, Phil.-hist. Kl., Band III.

(6) Abhandl. d. K. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., Kl. I, Band XXII Abt. III.

is a considerable common element, as he shows, in the vocabularies of all these different groups of languages and also a good deal of similarity in the way they use their prefixes and infixes. Professor Schmidt claims, therefore, to have made out their common origin and connexion as a new family of languages, which he proposes to call the "Austroasiatic" family on account of the geographical position of its members, lying as they do scattered over the south-eastern corner of the Asiatic continent. This family is to include all the above mentioned languages, extending from Central India to the Malay Peninsula, inclusive.

So far, this result may be said to embody and confirm conclusions the probability of which had already been tentatively foreshadowed by previous investigators. Professor Schmidt has accumulated fresh evidence in their favour and invested them with a much higher degree of probability. He now proceeds to take a further step, by connecting his "Austroasiatic" family of languages with the great Malayo-Polynesian family (as it has hitherto been called), to which Malay and the other languages of Indonesia, Polynesia and Melanesia (with the exception of the Papuan languages) belong. Thus, if this view be tenable, Sakai and Malay would after all be real, though very distant, relations; linguistically.

This is indeed a bold conception; but in order to appreciate the value of it, the evidence on which it rests must be considered and for that purpose the article itself must be consulted. No attempt can be made to reproduce its details here. Suffice it to say that in its main lines this conclusion is based on the recognised and generally accepted results of the comparative study of the Malayo-Polynesian languages and is an attempt to carry that line of investigation to its logical outcome. These languages in their present stage of development are ' (as is well known) made up of stem-words which are mostly of two syllables. There would seem therefore to be a fundamental difference between their structure and that of the "Austroasiatic" tongues with their monosyllabic roots. But research into the Malayo-Polynesian languages has shown that in very many cases their stem-words have been built up from earlier monosyl-

lables. This has usually, as in the "Austroasiatic" languages, been done by means of some prefix, and it is therefore as a rule the last syllable of a Malayo-Polynesian stem-word that represents the original root. But sometimes an infix and occasionally a suffix appears to have been used. Professor Schmidt's view is that the Malayo-Polynesian roots were originally *all* monosyllabic and that the modern stem-words of two syllables with which we are familiar have been formed from the original roots by the agglutination of formative elements. These last, he conceives, once had a more or less definite function in the way of differentiating the meaning of the root, but have now become quite fossilised and being no longer separable from the root are regarded as an essential part of the word. Thus it is that the Malayo-Polynesian languages possess very few monosyllabic words but a very large proportion of words of two syllables.

If this view of the structure of the Malayo-Polynesian languages is correct' (and it is certainly consistent with the results of the study of those languages by several independent scholars of great authority), clearly a great step has been taken towards bridging the apparent gulf between them and the "Austroasiatic" family. It must further be observed that on this old fossilised structure the Malayo-Polynesian tongues have superimposed a newer system of formatives which serve the purpose of differentiating grammatical functions. Thus they deal with their stem-words in much the same way as they are supposed to have dealt' (and the "Austroasiatic" languages are known to have dealt) with the original monosyllabic root-words. There is a considerable amount of analogy between these different families of speech in the use and even in the form of the prefixes and infixes which they respectively employ. The most striking cases, perhaps, are the prefix *pa-*, which in the Mon-Khmer languages, Nicobarese and the Malayo-Polynesian family forms causatives, and the infixes *-n-* and *-m-* which, with somewhat varying functions, are found in a good many of these different languages. There are other points of grammatical analogy enumerated in Professor Schmidt's article: but they are somewhat less cogent and it would take up

too much space to discuss them here. Finally, in an appendix he gives over 200 groups of words in which in his opinion a comparison between the "Austroasiatic" and the Malayo-Polynesian' (or, as he proposes to style them, "Austro-nesian") forms shows an identity of root.

With regard to these verbal comparisons, I must say that while some of them are not at first sight very convincing, yet there is a considerable proportion where the analogy is so striking that one can hardly attribute it to mere chance coincidence. In compiling the comparative vocabulary of aboriginal dialects contained in "Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula" I was often struck by the curious analogies presented by Malay words on the one hand and Mon-Khmer words on the other, so that in some cases it seemed impossible to decide with which set of languages a given aboriginal word was most closely connected. In No. 38 of this Journal I had ventured tentatively to account for the occurrence of similar words in Malayan languages and Mon and Khmer by the suggestion that they might be ancient Malayan loanwords in the Mon-Khmer languages, derived by them from the now extinct Malayan dialects of Southern Indo-China. That such loanwords do exist there can be no doubt; but I now see that this explanation is quite inadequate. It cannot account for the large number of analogies pointed out by Professor Schmidt in his last paper, especially now that Khasi and Munda have been brought into the comparison. For here, surely, Malayan influence is quite excluded. Thus the Bahnar word *tölly*, "rope", might well be suspected of being a mere Malayan loanword (from the Cham *lalei*); but when we find *tyllai* in Khasi, we no longer feel able to account for the latter form in this way and may even have our doubts about the Bahnar word. On the other hand Professor Schmidt concedes that the Bahnar *dönaü*, "lake", may well be a loanword from the Malayo-Polynesian languages: he has not succeeded in finding it in other Mon-Khmer languages. I may suggest that it comes from the Cham *danau*.

I think there can be no objection to my giving a small selection from the 215 instances in Professor Schmidt's ap-

pendix. In the following cases there seems to be really no doubt that the roots are identical (I give extracts only): No. 6 Malay *rēkat* (to which I think should be added *lēkat* and *ikat*) = Bahnar *kāt*, *köt*, "to bind", Mon *dakat*, "to knot"; No. 7 Malay, etc. *takut* = Khmer *kot*, Mon *taküt*, "to fear"; No. 182 Malay *tēlūt* = Khmer *lut*, "to bend (the knee)", Bahnar *lot*, "to enter in a bowed attitude"; No. 183 Malay *tēlan*, etc. = Bahnar *lūön*, Stieng *luön*, "to swallow." There are a good many more that could be quoted. On the other hand some of the comparisons seem to me exceedingly dubious. Even when the correspondence in form is to all appearance very close, it often happens that the connexion in meaning strikes one as being uncommonly far-fetched. There seems to be here a gap in the method of such investigations. What we want to guide us through the mazes of derived and cognate words, is a science of the relations of the secondary meanings of words to their primary ones. I believe that the groundwork of such a science has already been laid down for some of the better known families of language. But it is clear that its lines must be retracted for all the different cultural strata of mankind. What strikes the savage in one way would probably strike the more civilised man in quite another fashion. It requires a really intimate acquaintance with the primitive mind to be able to produce its processes with any approach to certainty.

In many cases the etymologies suggested by Professor Schmidt are nothing more or less than highly ingenious guesses. Thus, for example, he sees in the Malay *dukut*, "grass," (which does not occur in Wilkinson's Dictionary and is perhaps a Javanese loanword) a root meaning "green," for which however the only authority given is the Stieng *küt*, "green." Malay *akar*, "root," etc., is similarly traced to the Bahnar *kor*, "to go down to the ground." Malay *pandan*, "pandanus," is connected with the idea of sweetness: I believe the juice of its fruit gives a drinkable liquor, but is it particularly sweet? Malay *lindak*, "porcupine", again, is explained as the animal which "rolls itself up: "one knows that hedgehogs roll themselves into a ball when attacked, but I am not enough of a naturalist to be sure that porcupines do the like, though it

seem probable. The connexion between the ideas of "spreading out" (Malay *hampar*) and "flying" (Mon-Khmer *par*) seems to me highly conjectural; nor can it be said to be much assisted by the Mon *gapaw-a*, "to go around."

In one or two instances we find an unfortunate diversity of opinion among our authorities in Malayo-Polynesian etymology. Thus according to Dr. Brandstetter the Malay word *telinga*, "ear," contains a root *ling*, identical with *ding*, which in its variant form *dēng* also occurs in Malay *dēngar*, and which he interprets as meaning "to hear." Professor Schmidt on the other hand takes the word *telinga*, to be derived from a root *ling* (found in *tēliling*, etc.) meaning "to turn," "to return," "round," and connects the word with the shape of the external human ear, not with the function of the internal part of the organ. Who can say which is right? True, Professor Schmidt gives a similar etymology for the Malay *kuping*, which also means "ear;" but there is no more certainty in this derivation than in the other. In fact there is less: for the parallels quoted mean not "to wind," as he would have it, but "to bind," "to plait" and "to weave." It seems to me that we want something more than mere conjecture to bridge the gap between these conceptions and the idea of the human (or animal?) ear. Again in the word *rambut*, "hair," Professor Schmidt finds a root *but*, "to roll," "to twist," "to fall." This does not seem very apposite, but he gets over the difficulty by explaining that *rambut*, means "that which is matted." The majority of modern Indonesians have lank hair which does not form itself into a mat or mop even when allowed to grow to its natural length. If the explanation is correct, we have here a very valuable piece of prehistoric anthropological information, namely that part of the ancestry of the very mixed modern Indonesian from which he derives the essentials of his language did not have lank but wavy or possibly even curly hair. Unfortunately Dr. Brandstetter quite independently and without any reference to the above suggested etymology points out that the words for "hair" in the Indonesian languages display four variants of one root, viz. *buk*, *but*, *bul*, and the simpler form *bu*. That these are all in some way connected

with one another is as good as certain: there are too many similar cases in these languages to admit of our attributing such resemblances to mere accidental coincidence. But how they are connected is a problem that still awaits a solution and until that question is satisfactorily answered Professor Schmidt's derivation is at any rate premature: it is no use accounting for *but* and leaving its three poor relations out in the cold.

There are one or two other minor points, not essential to the main argument of the paper, on which I feel compelled to differ from the author. While agreeing with him that Bēsisi has a closer relation to the Mon-Khmer languages than Sēnoi or Tēmbe' have, I cannot admit that the same proposition holds good of the Jakun dialects. Whatever may be their origin, it seems to me that the Jakun dialects are very remote from the Mon-Khmer family. Further I think his suggestion that Sēnoi represents a mixture between Sēmang and Bēsisi is quite unarguable. What these three have in common is the element allied to Mon-Khmer and this is very often more archaic in Sēnoi than in the other two groups. Again I think that his view that the words *jung*, "foot," *sēlak*, "leaf," and *dak*, "water" are Aryan loanwords imported into the Further Indian languages' (including the aboriginal dialects of the Peninsula) at a remote date when the linguistic ancestry of the tribes that use them were in contact with Aryan races, is an arbitrary assumption. It is based on a resemblance with certain Sanskrit words, which resemblance may after all be purely fortuitous in these three cases. One of the arguments by which Professor Schmidt supports his contention is that these words do not appear in Sēmang. As a matter of fact there is conclusive evidence that the word for "leaf" does occur in the Sēmang dialects. But anyhow it seems highly improbable that the native terms for such ordinary everyday objects as "foot," "leaf," and "water" should in such a very large number of allied languages have been replaced by Aryan equivalents.

In another part of his paper Professor Schmidt seeks to show that the great linguistic synthesis which he propounds

and in support of which he has brought forward such weighty arguments is balanced by a fundamental unity of race among the peoples that speak these various allied languages. I venture to think that this view must be received with much caution. Whether or not there is a thin strain of common blood running through these very diverse races is a point that does not and cannot affect the classification of their languages. Personally I rather regret that the attempt has been made to establish even a qualified racial unity such as this amongst populations which differ physically amongst themselves as much as chalk does from cheese. Not only is it in my judgment premature inasmuch as the data available are quite inadequate to support the conclusion, but it is liable to do harm by casting doubt on the validity of the purely linguistic inferences, where the evidence is far more perfect. Everyone remembers the absurd inferences which were formerly drawn from the existence of the Indo-European family of languages: how we were gravely told that the same blood courses in the veins of the Bengali and the Iclander, and so forth, merely because their languages are ultimately derived from a common source. There is a similar danger in the present case. We must not let linguistic relationships blind us to anthropological differences. It is important to remember that such differences are deepseated and that the new family of languages recognised by Professor Schmidt (assuming its existence as proved) under the name of the "Austic" family is spoken by races as different from one another as those which speak the Indo-European languages. Some are Mongoloid in physical type, others approximate more towards the Caucasian form (which of course by no means implies any real relationship with the Caucasian race, commonly so called); some are practically indistinguishable from Dravidians in physique, others again are Negritos of a fairly pure kind, and many are Oriental Negroes indistinguishable from their cousins who speak the quite alien Papuan languages. Professor Schmidt is far too intimately acquainted with the intricacies of his subject to be unaware of these differences and the difficulties to which some of them give rise. What I complain of is that he has not

drawn attention to the existence of these complicated problems with sufficient distinctness, so as to warn those who do not know as much about the matter as he does himself. He is inclined, in support of his unifying scheme, to glide quietly over the difficulties that still remain unexplained.

I cannot here go into the other points raised in this interesting and valuable paper, but must refer anyone who wants more information to the original itself or to the French translation which has recently appeared in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*, Tome VII., Nos. 3 & 4, under the title "Les peuples Mon-Khmér, trait d'union entre les peuples de l'Asie centrale et de l'Austronésie." Whether its conclusions be accepted in their entirety or not, there can be no doubt that it is an epochmaking and most important contribution to philological science.